

Council Meeting Minutes

May 16, 2023

The Tazewell Town Council met in a work session at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall Council Chambers.

Present:

Absent:

Mayor Michael Hoops

Vice Mayor Glenn Catron

Councilmember Jonathan Hankins

Councilmember Zach Cline

Councilmember Emily Davis

Councilmember David Fox

Councilmember Joe Beasley

Staff present were: Town Manager, Todd Day; Executive Assistant, Robin Brewster; Clerk/Treasurer, Leanne Regon.

Manager day thanked everyone for coming to the work session. He stated that it is hard to get a lot done meeting once a month. Several years ago, it was said that you couldn't even get a drink on Main Street. Now look how far we've come. He stated that in 2013 VT did a SWAT analysis and we held a meeting in the American Legion Building and it was packed. People came because they wanted to see what was happening.

Manager Day asked what is work force development. Councilmember Beasley stated that it depends on the industry. Manager Day said that is exactly right. Then asked what industry did we have here. You have to have something, an industry, before you can do workforce development. Legislation passed in years past where businesses were given incentives to come to our area and make it attractive for employees to move here. Then you can say, ok SVCC we need training for people in this particular sector. Congressman Boucher showed three Fortune 500 companies Tazewell and he sure wished one of the would have come here. He then asked what was inflation over the last few years. Councilmember Cline answered 8% or so. Manager Day stated that in the time that this council is serving now, they will have to look at raising rates. It doesn't mean that it will pass but they would be looking at it.

The reason that this meeting was asked for is because we need to find how we can work better as a team and be more proactive for our community. He handed out notebooks to each of them and asked them to write what would they like to see accomplished. He asked them to take five minute and write down ideas or goals they would have.

Vice Mayor Catron- to have a common and shared vision. All working toward the same goal, whatever it is. We are all in this together. Where is the vision of the town in three years, five years, ten years? He has been here for 11 budgets and they are not getting any easier. He is reluctant to change rates and taxes.

Councilmember Hankins- Listen to all ideas and find ways that they can make this town better.

Councilmember Cline – make wise decisions and operate in the realms a government should operate in.

Mayor Hoops– open for discussions for other industry and take community input into consideration.

Councilmember Fox- fence at the park, work together and not against each other. He is fighting for what the people want. He wants to see growth and bring more into the town. He is looking at placement of new businesses. He has ideas of where businesses could be built. He wants it safe and easy accessible, possibly by the football field on Maplewood. Someone spoke up and said they think the county has bought that property. It was looked up and it is currently still in CNX's name on GIS.

Councilmember Davis- move unanimously and together. She also stated that she see's Councilmember Fox's side. That the area could get congested and she asked about the fairgrounds.

Councilmember Beasley- unified vision, measurable checkpoints, what is successful and then move to the next step, time tables and clarity on what goals are and how to achieve it.

Manager Day stated that he hears a lot of this, is just asking for more communication for everyone. Communication, or lack thereof is 90% of problems. It is important to stay together as one united front. His ideas or suggestions are as follows- create committees in different areas. Do your communication in your element. Make everybody a team player. If you have a plan and communicate it with your colleagues you will all, be working together better.

Manager Day stated that he gets phone calls from elected officials of them venting. He'll listen and give input but he tries to stay in his lane and not overstep. He takes for granted the years that he has been in local government. He takes the power of his employees for granted. He gave an example, what if we did not pay the power bill. You would drive up the street and the red light would be out because we didn't pay the bill. He then asked how to improve communication. Councilmember Davis stated that it is harder for all to meet because we have to plan it and advertise it. But in situations like this she doesn't mind to have meeting like this more often.

Manager Day stated that seven or eight years ago council got together and discussed the sports industry. It is one of the fastest growing industries out there. If you have ever been to a travel team game/tournament you see what it is. You see what it could bring. Councilmember Davis stated that the way we were approaching the sports complex, we wouldn't be running it. Councilmember Hankins asked why would we put out \$5-\$6 million dollars to a business we won't be running. Manager Day stated that something had to change. We have to try and bring in some industry and do something to help our town. Grant money was how we were hoping we would proceed with this project. We would own it; it would just be operated by another company. He discussed some of the grant leads that he had. Councilmember Hankins asked what if in five years they say it's not working and they want out. Vice Mayor Catron stated that they were going to sign a 20-year lease. Councilmember Davis stated that if we keep going like we are now, we will have less people and have higher rates because of those that left, the ones still here will have to pay for it. Rural Development had a program that says if we couldn't make the payments that they would make it for us. Councilmember Cline asked what would make the funding agencies not back our project. Manager Day read an email from John Wack that says

“we believe” this could be funded. Councilmember Cline asked what are the five major funding agencies. It was answered:

ARC which was going to be \$2.5 million

EDA (Virginia Economic Development) which would be a stretch and a lower grant amount, it was going to be \$5 million

Tobacco Commission which was going to be \$1.5 million

VACEDA which was going to be \$1 million

Town which was going to be \$3 million

Private Foundations which were going to be \$1.5 million

Councilmember Cline asked when there was a stop work order put on for this project, ARC and EDA said that the funding was not what they thought it would be. Therefore we didn't think we could get that much funding.

Manager Day read minutes from a work session with Jim Baldwin from October 12, 2021:

“WORK SESSION

SPORTS COMPLEX

Manager Day introduced Jim Baldwin with Cumberland Plateau Planning District (CPPD). Mr. Baldwin thanked Manager Day. He stated that this is the busiest time that he can ever remember and there is more money for towns and counties to get now than ever before. He stated that ARPA funds are available also. CCPD is an economic entity and local governments can work with them for funding opportunities. He said we are in a good place right now to be working on a project like this. Because of increased funds there is a lot more interest and the process to get funding will be faster than normal.

He stated that the EDA is a funder of manufacturing and industrial projects. It was recommended for this project to ask for \$5 million dollars instead of the \$3 million that we were going to ask for. There are a few stipulations for our application. Such as, we need to have an impact study, which we already have. We need to have preliminary engineering done and we need to have environmental assessments done. CPPD can do that free of charge for us if we would like them to. He also stated a project like this will not get done with just one funder. He suggests also looking at ARC, DHCD, VACEDA and other local funding sources.

Manager Day stated that we hired Chmura and they have done a feasibility study for us. We have had a lot of communication with funding agencies. He asked what the Town needed to do to get CPPD on board. Mr. Baldwin stated that he didn't need an official ask that this meeting would be fine to start the process in seeking funding. Manager Day stated that he is very passionate about this project and he would like to request help in seeking out any funding we would be eligible for. Mr. Baldwin said he would be glad to do it and he would give 110% and work with us any way necessary. He did recommend a trip to Richmond to show that we wanted a meeting with their funding representatives and to show our commitment to the project. Before Covid, that trip would generally be made in January but he could help set those meetings up. Manager Day accepted his offer and Mayor Hoops stated that he is ready anytime.

Mr. Baldwin asked about the site for the project and if we had a site plan. Manager Day stated that he would send him lots of information tomorrow on this project. Mr. Baldwin stated that he will try to put this project in the best light possible and put the best application out that we can. Typically, this will require a local match, the Town needs to be thinking about what we could put up. Mayor Hoops stated that we are/will be reaching out to the Tobacco Commission, the Shott Foundation, and the Thompson Charitable Foundation as well. He stated that we are trying to get every funding opportunity we can. Council thanked Mr. Baldwin for coming.”

Manager Day stated that he had conversations with each of those funding agencies. He has spoken with a couple of them lately.

Mayor Hoops stated that from the minutes that were just read, it said that we didn't need to request Mr. Baldwin to do the application, that meeting was enough to ask. It was asked if Mr. Baldwin ever did the application. Manager Day stated that the application was never done. Councilmember Cline stated that if we don't get funding from one agency, that means the Town's responsibility to fund the project goes up. He then asked why the stop work order was put in place. Manager Day stated because he could play ball with them. If you don't work the projects, it doesn't happen. We haven't tried to get the funding. If you don't talk to the funding agencies, its not going to happen. If you don't have backing from your Southern District, you won't make it happen. If the council is not backing it, its not going to happen. Councilmember Cline asked when Mr. Baldwin change his mind. Manager Day answered something happened between October 2021 and October 2022. Councilmember Beasley asked what makes us think that we won't get funding now. Manager Day stated that he has been working with Mercer County on the Arise Grant and they've made a lot of head way. Councilmember Beasley asked what we could do now to get funding. Manager Day stated that all of council has to be passionate about it. They all have to be on board. They have to get their supervisors on board. When people in the community says they don't want it, find out why and educate them on what it could do for our town. Councilmember Cline stated that what it comes down to for him is what will it cost the Town. The question comes to how much do we spend on EMS, how much do we spend on police department, how much do we spend on a sports complex. Manager Day stated that he understands that and he gets it. But if we want to have a shot at this, everyone has to be together. Before he can say yes or no, that we can make debt payments he has to know what kind of funding we can get. But unless everyone supports it and spread their support around, it won't happen. Its about having someone to push for it and make it happen.

Councilmember Cline asked council how they felt about being responsible for \$5 million or even more. Councilmember Beasley stated that we have goals for grants and fund raising. There are grants we could apply for. If we see that funding is not where we would like it to be, there may be sections of the sports complex we could cut out if needed to lessen the cost. It was also stated that if the sports complex did not generate enough funds that ESM would make the payment. Mayor Hoops asked what the funding cycle was. Manager Day stated that it is all over the place. But before we go there, there are things that he needs to do.

Councilmember Cline asked what limit are we comfortable at. Vice Mayor Catron stated that he sees what Councilmember Cline means because the higher the cost is for the Town, the more uncomfortable he gets. But why don't we give it a try and see what kind of funding we could get then look at what we are comfortable with. He also stated that an indoor sports complex is economic, soccer fields are more recreational. Also, Rural Development is also a back up if we have issues making debt payments and asked if that made Councilmember Cline more

comfortable. Councilmember Cline stated that he didn't want to get to that point. What if we do the WWTP and this and can't pay for it, the we have been bad stewards because we took on the debt. What would our return on investment be. Vice Mayor Catron stated that ESM would hire and pay employees and they would set up tournaments and keep them scheduled year-round for multiple uses. Councilmember Beasley stated that soccer will not bring in as many people, will it be enough to bring in a hotel, a restaurant. Indoor would be. Councilmember Cline stated that we have two options right now. What about a third option, we set on out interest from our LGIP and use it to help pay on the debt. Councilmember Beasley stated that he doesn't think the interest would be enough to do that. Vice Mayor Catron is optimistic that we would be able to pay off the debt before the 25 years was up. If we can get one funder, it puts pressure to other funders and they would be more likely to fund the project. Manager Day had a private entity tell him a week ago they would put \$200,000 toward it. He stated that this meeting tonight went farther than he ever dreamed. He asked could they meet again. They said yes. He said we would meet again and talk it out and see where they want it to go. He thanked council and council thanked him. Council also thanked each other.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Hoops adjourned the meeting at 8:45pm.